DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 421 999 IR 057 115

AUTHOR	Starr, Kevin; Keller, Shelly, Ed.
TITLE	Keeping the Promise: Recommendations for Effective Library Service to African Americans.
INSTITUTION	California State Library, Sacramento.
SPONS AGENCY	Department of Education, Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	1996-00-00
NOTE	23p.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom (055) -- Reports - Evaluative (142)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Access to Information; *Black History; *Black Literature; *Blacks; Cultural Awareness; Library Collection Development; Library Funding; Library Materials; Library Personnel; Library Policy; *Library Services; Needs Assessment; Public Libraries; Staff Development; User Needs (Information)
IDENTIFIERS	*African Americans

ABSTRACT

This publication was created to provide guidance to public service librarians, administrators and library directors on how to improve service to African Americans throughout California, promoting literacy, and providing materials by and about African Americans for the entire library community. One of the first issues the task force identified was the widespread interest in African American culture that extends well beyond the African American community. Issues and recommendations covered in this publication include: needs assessment and community analysis; community connections; access; materials and collection development; personnel and staff development; services and programs; technology in libraries; marketing and awareness; funding; political concerns; and evaluation. This publication is a call to action for librarians and library directors to begin to make the needed changes in policies, procedures, services and programs that will result in enhanced service to the African American community. (AEF)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 421 999

Keeping the Promise:

Recommendations for Effective Library Service to African Americans

IR057115

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

A publication of the California State Library

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

C.D. Robertson

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Photo by Brooks Photo

Our cover photograph shows four panels from the Storybook Quilt entitled, "Lift Ev'ry Voice." Inspired by children's books, the quilt is a joint project of Khocolate Keepsakes Literacy Club and Hub City Reading Council. The quilt was designed by Elise Arias. Thanks to Camille Neely, Gwen Westbrooks and the many teachers and students of Compton Unified Schools, Compton, California, for their work. For more information on the Storybook Quilt Literacy Project, contact: Khocolate Keepsakes at (213) 735-9071.

Keeping the Promise :

Recommendations for Effective Library Service to African Americans

Dr. Kevin Starr

State Librarian of California

California State Library

1996

Edited by

Shelly Keller

Contents

Acknowledgements iv

About the Authors v

Introduction 1

Needs Assessment and Community Analysis 2

Community Connections 3

Access 4

Materials and Collection Development 5

Personnel and Staff Development 6

Services and Programs 7

Technology in Libraries 8

Marketing and Awareness 8

Funding 9

Political Concerns 10

Evaluation 12

Conclusion 13

Bibliography 14

Acknowledgements

Many thanks go to the following individuals who contributed and supported this endeavor: Dr. Kevin Starr, State Librarian of California; Liz Gibson, Bureau Chief, Library Development Services, California State Library; Ed Bradley, CBS News; Willie L. Brown, Mayor, San Francisco; Colin L. Powell, General, U.S. Army (Retired); Alvin F. Poussaint, M.D., Harvard Medical School; Emma Clark, Acting City Librarian (Retired), Richmond Public Library; Kenneth E. Dowlin, City Librarian, San Francisco Public Library, Susan Goldberg Kent, City Librarian, Los Angeles Public Library; Sandra F. Reuben, County Librarian, County of Los Angeles Public Library; William W. Sannwald, City Librarian, San Diego Public Library; Stephanie Sterling Brasley, President, Greater Los Angeles Chapter of the California Librarians' Black Caucus; Effie Lee Morris, former Coordinator of Children's Services, San Francisco Public Library; Yvonne Camille Neely, Khocolate Keepsakes and Papyrus Book Distributors; Joyce Sumbi, California Librarians' Black Caucus; Binnie Tate Wilkin, Library Services Consultant and Professional Storyteller; Alyce J. Archuleta, Supervising Librarian, San Diego Public Library; Jeri Ewart, African American Museum and Library of Oakland; Jené Gresham; Amy Holloway, Librarian, San Francisco Public Library and San Francisco African American Historical and Cultural Society Library and Archives; Olive James, San Francisco Public Library; Albert W. Johnson, Senior Librarian, Young Adult Services, Los Angeles Public Library; Karen Joseph, Branch Supervisor, Claremont Branch of Berkeley Public Library; Fannie Love, Community Library Manager, County of Los Angeles Public Library's A.C. Bilbrew Library and Black Resource Center; Julie Odofin, Children's Services Coordinator, Oakland Public Library; and Natalie Rencher, Librarian, San Diego Public Library's Malcom X Public Library and Performing Arts Center.

About the Authors

Billie Dancy is Director of the Oakland Public Library. Previously, she was Director of the South San Francisco Public Library and also served at Riverside City and County Public Library as Head of the Central Library, Head of Branch Services, and Collection Development Coordinator. She is a member of the Executive Board and the Assembly of the California Library Association and the California Librarians' Black Caucus. Billie earned a B.A. from the University of California at Riverside, and her M.L.I.S. from UCLA.

Elizabeth Hope Hayes is Administrative Director of the African American Museum and Library at Oakland. She has served at San Francisco Public Library as Chief of the Main Library, Chief of Branch Libraries, and Principal Librarian. She has been a member of the San Francisco African American Historical and Cultural Society, the American Library Association Accreditation Committee, California Library Association, American Library Association, California Librarians' Black Caucus, American Association of Museums, and Western Association of Museums. She has also served as former officer for St. Anthony Foundation Board of Trustees, and President of the City College Southeast Campus Advisory Board. She received her B.A. and M.A. from San Francisco State University. Hope earned her M.L.S. from the University of California at Berkeley.

Maggie Johnson is Senior Librarian at the Los Angeles Public Library's Memorial Branch. She serves on the Los Angeles Public Library's Strategic Planning Advisory Committee, the Affirmative Action Association for Women, the American Library Association's Black Caucus, and is Executive Vice-president of the Librarians' Guild AFSCME Local 2626. Maggie earned her B.A. from Florida A&M University and her M.S.L.S. from the University of Southern California.

Sharon Johnson is Librarian IV and Community Library Manager at the County of Los Angeles Public Library's Compton Branch. She has served in the California Library Association Assembly and is past president of the Greater Los Angeles Chapter of the California Librarians' Black Caucus. She is also a member of the California Library Association, the American Library Association and the American Library Association's Black Caucus. Sharon earned her B.A. from California State University, Dominguez Hills and her M.L.S. from the University of Southern California.

Shelly Keller, President of Keller Marketing and Communications, has been public relations consultant to the California State Library since 1988. She was head writer and editor of *Keeping the Promise.* She also edited the American Library Association's *Celebrate America's Diversity* manual and was head writer and editor of the California State Library's *Adelante: Recommendations for Effective Library Service to the Spanish-speaking.* She has been a member of the California State Library's Partnerships for Change Task Force since 1989. Shelly earned her B.S. from the University of Maryland.

Kathy Low is Principal Librarian at the California State Library. She earned a B.A. in Spanish from the University of California at Davis and her M.L.S. from San Jose State University.

Geoffrey Miller is Audio-Visual Librarian II at Richmond Public Library where he developed the African American video collection. His novel, *The Black Glove,* was published by Viking Publishing in 1981. Geoffrey earned his B.A. and M.L.S. from UCLA.

Leslie Jean Simmons is Branch Manager of the San Diego Public Library's University Heights Branch. She serves on the Board of Directors of Palavra Tree, Inc. and is a member of the American Library Association, the California Library Association, the California Librarians' Black Caucus, the National Management Association, and REFORMA. Leslie earned her B.A. from the State University of New York at Buffalo, and her M.L.S. from the State University of New York at Albany.

Introduction

This publication was created to provide guidance to public service librarians, administrators and library directors on how to improve service to African Americans throughout California. Next to New York, California has the largest African American population in the United States. According to the 1990 Census Report, there are approximately 30,488,000 African Americans (12 percent of the total population) living in the United States. There are 2,092,446 African Americans residing in California, comprising 7 percent of the population.

Keeping the Promise was written by the California State Library's Task Force on Service to African Americans, a group composed of public library staff from around the state. One of the first issues the task force identified was the widespread interest in African American culture that extends well beyond the African American community. People other than African Americans are interested in Black Studies and African Americans are interested in everything. Also, African Americans reside in nearly all communities. As a result, this publication focuses on enhancing public library service to African Americans, promoting literacy, and providing materials by and about African Americans for the entire library community.

Photo by Lucy Meinhardt, Richmond Public Library

In preparing this publication, the task force identified several goals and objectives.

They include:

- Helping librarians understand the differences within the African American culture, and that African American culture is diverse;
- Dispelling myths and misconceptions about African Americans;
- Creating a clear, concise tool to guide librarians in providing service, access and materials to African Americans and the community at large;
- Promoting the popularity and wider appreciation of African American culture;
- Providing information on how to connect with the African American community; and
- Promoting the recruitment of diverse library staff to better reflect the makeup of each library's community.

A wide variety of topics is covered in this publication: needs assessment and community analysis; community connections; access; materials and collection development; personnel and staff development; services and programs; technology in libraries; marketing and awareness; funding; political concerns; and evaluation.

In developing these guidelines and recommendations, one goal remains paramount: promoting equal library access for all via inclusive policies, procedures, services and programs. We hope you will find *Keeping the Promise* to be a useful tool for enhancing your library's service to its community.

Needs Assessment and Community Analysis

The first step to enhancing library services to African Americans is to develop a profile of the African American community the library serves. Because library resources are limited, services need to be focused and significant while not duplicating the efforts of other community agencies. A meaningful profile of the community can be developed by examining Census and other community information and data.

It is important to identify the information needs of the African American community and assess the adequacy of current library resources in meeting those information needs. It is also helpful to document current patterns of library use by African Americans, and identify barriers to library use.

Photo by Lucy Meinhardt, Richmond Public Library

Also integral to the needs assessment process is contacting other community agencies and organizations serving the African American community. In designing a needs assessment and deciding which methods to use, it is important that you decide what information you need, why you need it, and how accurate it must be. The methods you choose should be those that can potentially provide the information you need, with the desired level of accuracy in the most timely and cost-effective way.

Aside from examining existing data, needs assessment methods include interviewing key individuals in the community (clergy, elected officials, editors of African American newspapers, and other community leaders), and using forums, focus groups and surveys to compile information on the community. It is important to establish trust in the community by identifying and connecting with African American community leaders before you survey the community. Let them know the goals and purpose of your survey and recruit their support in promoting community participation in the survey. In working with community leaders, there is a need for patience and persistence. People want to help but they may need deadlines and reminders to stay involved in the process.

Surveys can be conducted by telephone or in person, at the library or at African American religious institutions or cultural and community centers. Some libraries use city utility bills, government newsletters, and Internet home pages to survey their communities. Others distribute surveys in church programs and Black newspapers. It is important to allow enough time to conduct a needs assessment, compile results, analyze data and then act on the results.

Needs assessment is the first step in developing the community's sense of

"ownership" of the library. By making personal contact with people, staff can involve them in planning for the library's future. Their sense of ownership will come from being part of the planning process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Create a community advisory committee to help identify community resources. Identify community leaders and invite them to participate in the library's needs assessment. Follow up with person-to-person contact.
- Distribute surveys and questionnaires throughout the community. Include African American cultural and community centers, business and educational centers.
- Include children, young adults and the elderly in your survey sample.
- Follow up your surveys by publicizing the results. Thank the people who have responded or participated.
- Try to conduct a needs assessment at least every five years. The labor intensive nature of a needs assessment requires careful planning and the participation of more than one staff member.

Community Connections

It is important to establish a network of contacts within the African American community by developing working relationships with key individuals and groups which represent the community. This can be achieved by establishing a rapport with African Americans on local boards and commissions, by connecting with church leaders, local educators, Black newspaper editors and business people, and including them when surveying the African American community's information needs. Tap into the network of professional organizations and community leaders in the NAACP, United Negro College Fund, inner city boys and girls clubs, and Chamber of Commerce in your area, and be sure to include leaders of arts, cultural and professional groups.

In making community connections, it is also important to create reciprocal partnerships. Identify African American community partners with goals similar to those of the library. To establish and maintain the library's credibility in the community, make long-term and ongoing connections by developing relationships with members of the community.

The relationships the library builds in the African American community will result in mutual benefit for the library and the community. In learning about the community's cultural characteristics and information needs, the library also sends a message of caring. Through these contacts, the library generates visibility, credibility and support from the community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Attend community events to establish visibility and network. Make the

"I have had to make many tough and weighty decisions in my life. They were made easier, however, because I prepared myself by constant reading and study. Public libraries, and the free access to knowledge that they provide, have often been my beacons and polestars for that process."

Colin L. Powell,
General, U.S. Army (Retired)

library a resource for community groups.

- Create a library presence at community and cultural events to promote the library. Seek opportunities to speak to community groups about the value of the library to the African American community. Encourage library staff and volunteers to make community connections.
- Connect with other City or County departmental staff to broaden your community connections.
- Connect with local Black religious organizations. Religion and religious organizations play important roles in the African American community.
- Establish connections with business partners who can help you reach your goals for improving library technology, training staff or developing homework centers. For example, turn to hospitals and insurance companies to help you provide and distribute health information materials.

Photo by Lucy Meinhardt, Richmond Public Library

Access

Public libraries that wish to provide information to and about African Americans need to address service and information barriers to access. In most libraries, access issues include: creating a welcoming environment; the library's location and physical building; providing customer service; cataloging; collection location; electronic access; library hours; and exhibits and displays. Creating a safe, secure environment for staff and the public is important, as is helping staff develop their customer service skills. Do not forget what a smile can do in creating a welcoming environment. Posters, exhibits, book displays and special bibliographies can also play an important role in creating a welcoming environment. The more effort and resources invested in providing access, the more useful and valuable the library will be to the African American community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Make every effort to establish hours of service that are convenient for both children and adult patrons.
- Evaluate and improve collection visibility and library signage, including street signage.

- Provide a clean, uncluttered, welcoming environment. Decorate your library with stunning graphics which can be quickly and easily changed to fit the occasion.
- Pay attention to the physical condition of the African American collection and how materials are displayed and labeled. The goal is to provide a current, well maintained, quality collection.
- Provide a map or guide to the location of African American materials and make them easily accessible. Create pathfinders, guides and bibliographies of materials by and about African Americans. This is especially useful with new technology and on-line catalogs.
- Require that staff project welcoming attitudes. It is important for staff to understand the value of customer service for all library users.
- When possible, provide easy access to all materials in the African American collection. For example, use special signage or book spine labeling for materials to improve access.
- Provide access to technology with an on-line catalog, access to the Internet, CD ROMS, and other new technology.
- When providing new technology, include patron and staff training in the budget and plan.
- Create a nonthreatening, user-friendly library environment with friendly, knowledgeable staff and adequate seating.

Materials/Collection Development

Every community library should have materials by, about and for African Americans in all formats. People of all ethnic and racial backgrounds are interested in materials written by and about African Americans.

Collection development should be tied to the library's needs assessment results, plus other sources. In developing the collection, quality is important so be selective. By networking with other libraries and local educators, staff can develop and prioritize recommendations for materials to be purchased. The library can also solicit and collect suggestions from library users for purchase of materials. Staff can review the interlibrary loan program for suggestions, or network with other libraries for suggestions. By broadening the search beyond the community, the library can identify not just local, but statewide and national information and resources.

When works by African American writers were being published by mainstream publishers in the 1960s and 1970s, their works were usually printed in short runs, eventually going out of print. Today, although some African American authors are published by major publishing houses, most are published through university presses, organizations, small publishers/presses and self-publishing. To find new titles, staff may need to check reviews in Black newspapers and magazines and visit African American bookstores.

"It is absolutely vital that African Americans are able to use public libraries in California to the fullest extent. Enjoying full access to libraries is part and parcel to enjoying full participation in American society. Our young people must be comfortable and familiar with libraries in every community. . . our future minds depend on it."

Willie Lewis Brown, Jr.
Mayor, San Francisco

"Libraries, through the books they hold, provide a road map to the world and a treasure trove of information."

Ed Bradley,
CBS News

To build retrospective collections or find books that are out-of-print, check used bookstores or remainder houses and try to patronize local businesses and vendors when possible. Some items are being reissued by publishers due to increased interest.

It is important to include resources specific to African Americans: medical resources specific to African Americans; biographies of African Americans; information on Black colleges and universities, scholarships and financial aid; job hunting, career development and training resources; resources on African American history and culture; and materials by and about African Americans for children as well as adults.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Complement needs assessment results with professional (library) recommendations.
- Include materials in all formats when building African American collections.
- Explore electronic resources in developing the collection.
- Continually develop and maintain a viable selection of African American resources and materials. Evaluate and weed out damaged or dated materials. Track and replace missing materials as appropriate.
- When purchasing a variety of media, consult other library specialists.
- Request that major vendors provide new materials by and for African Americans. Expand your search to include small publishers of African American materials.
- Include African American histories in the library's local history collection, and include materials in other languages about African Americans and the African American experience.

Personnel and Staff Development

An internal climate of acceptance of diversity within the library is essential to providing effective customer service. The library may need to change the way it provides service by looking at staff attitudes and awareness. It is important for library staff to understand and embrace the value of service to the entire community and the need for change. All library staff can benefit in ways that will change how they see and do things, whether through library staff training, sharing written information on cultural awareness, or attending African American events.

Encourage and enable staff to attend and participate in community events and be visible in the community. Get them out into the community, even if only to walk around, shop, have lunch or buy gas. This is especially important when staff work but do not live in the library's service area. Touring the community with library staff and volunteers can help illustrate how the library fits in with other City or County services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Provide diversity, customer service and technological training to all library staff, volunteers and board members on a continuing basis.
- Market the value of libraries and library careers by participating in career days at local schools and at college and university career fairs to promote library careers.
- Maintain a recruitment binder or file with information on library careers, schools, and scholarship opportunities.
- Provide library internships and promote them to schools, the media and the community.
- Set up mentoring programs and partnerships with library staff and recruit local student volunteers.
- Provide opportunities and funding for staff to develop their skills and strengths, whether it be in outreach, grant writing, training, or programming.

Services and Programs

Libraries should provide a variety of services and programs which are of interest to the African American community as individuals or in groups. Strive for variety in programming. Provide some programs that are culturally specific and some that are not. Be innovative. Include intergenerational programs and work with staff to provide programs such as: films, panel discussions, guest lecturers, storytellers, and performers. Put African American family scrapbooks on display. Build on successful services and repeat successful programs. Provide adequate funding in the budget for regular programming and strive for quality.

Photo by Lucy Meinhardt, Richmond Public Library

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Develop programs and services with input from the community. The library can create a community advisory committee to expand its resources for programming and identify community partners to present workshops. Programs can showcase new or local performers, as well as local authors, artists, poets and trainers. The library can also partner with local dance, theater and arts group to develop programming opportunities.
- Offer educational programs for adults such as how to start your own business, legal rights and responsibilities, voting, first time home buying, fund raising, and grant writing.
- Involve all levels of staff in program planning and implementation.
- Provide programs and services that encourage family participation.
- Take library programs off site to community locations such as Head Start, Boys and Girls Clubs, the YMCA, YWCA, child care centers, senior citizen centers, and after school programs.

Technology in Libraries

Libraries should provide access to technology so that everyone can participate in our information-based society. Encourage staff to understand that there are information/technology "haves" and "have nots" in all communities. Help staff understand that the library may be the only access point to information and technology for many. Remember that information-based technology is new to everyone. Technology in libraries creates many opportunities to help parents encourage their children to read and use the library.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Use the library to showcase technology.

Photo by Bonnie Kamin © 1996

- Develop a plan to introduce new equipment and technology to patrons. Provide user guides or patron training tools for all ages.
- Train staff on all new technology and equipment in the library prior to introducing them to the public.

Marketing and Awareness

The library must market its products and services in a variety of ways to attract potential users of African American materials. That means using every opportunity to promote use of the library and ownership of a library card. Promoting the library's African American materials in the community is the key to increasing usage.

Using information from the needs assessment, the library can promote the African American materials and resources to schools and religious organizations. Use media releases to local African American media, participate in community fairs and celebrations, and make presentations to all segments of the African American community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Promote library card ownership in a creative manner.
- Develop promotional packets for the community, including new residents, families, students new to the schools in the neighborhood, health clinics,

and businesses. Each packet may differ in content, depending upon where it will be distributed. Packets may contain library card applications, annual reports, bookmarks, bibliographies, program fliers, etc.

- Use local access cable television channels as much as possible. Contact your local cable television company for free community access time. They have camera equipment and production facilities for public use. All cable companies and local television and radio stations have community calendars or editorial programming which you can utilize.
- Make the library visible in the community. Creative use of banners, posters, fliers and other promotional materials will increase awareness of the library's collection, services and programs. Use promotional materials which include pictures and photographs of African Americans.
- Promote African American and Black Studies resources and materials.
- All libraries should have materials (posters, books, videos, etc.) on Martin Luther King, Jr. to celebrate his birthday. Plan programs for African American History Month, Juneteenth and Kwanzaa (the cultural holiday that is celebrated December 26-January 1 by African Americans of all religious faiths). Make an effort to participate in community events that celebrate these days.
- Develop and produce programs for children and adults using African American writers, artists and performers.
- Establish a relationship with the local newspaper, especially the African American newspaper if you have one in your community. Encourage them to publish your library's media releases promoting the library's collection, services and programs. If there is a local African American newspaper, their support is even more important to successfully promote the library's collection, services and programs.
- Send public service announcements of programs to local radio stations, especially those that reach the African American community.
- Encourage staff to visit local schools and other organizations to promote the library. Network with community agencies and volunteer for speakers' bureaus.
- Promote library resources and services out in the community with fliers, posters and bibliographies strategically placed in businesses and centers that serve African Americans. Put up posters and promotional materials in nontraditional locations such as religious institutions, barber and beauty shops.

"As one of six children, I distinguished myself academically at an early age by spending many hours in the library. Libraries work as partners for education with all levels of learning institutions."

Maynard Jackson
Mayor, Atlanta

Funding

Funding for materials and staff should reflect the needs of the community. The diverse reading interests and needs of library patrons, including African Americans, make it difficult to accurately determine the size of the budget

based on a percentage of the population. Although there may be more interest in materials by and about African Americans, general reading needs may vary based upon income level, location and education level of the population served.

Implementing such changes requires restructuring library services and budgets. Such change can only be accomplished with the buy-in and commitment of library directors and library administrators.

Photo by Bonnie Kamin © 1996

The challenge to library administrators is to provide sufficient funds to meet the needs of the African American community. The library can also seek funding in partnership with other community agencies such as Black sororities or fraternities, the American Association of University Women, and professional and labor organizations. Finally, the library should encourage staff to attend grant writing workshops.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Ask local businesses, religious institutions and other organizations to donate funds specifically for African American materials. For example, you may want to start a special collection (African American reference, video or audio collections) or an oral history project if support and donations for such a project are available.
- Do not rely solely on grants for funding ethnic collections. Search the Internet and other electronic networks for grants and other sources of funding. Seek and apply for grants that will augment, not replace, established budgets for materials and services to the African American community.
- Use proceeds from an annual book sale or some other fund raising event to purchase African American and other multicultural materials.
- Encourage local businesses, including professional sports teams, to support the library. They already have public relations staff and funds to raise their profile in the community. Ask them to support the library and literacy in the community.
- Be sure your patrons know (through signage or labeling) the names of the people and organizations that contribute materials and sponsor programs.

Political Concerns

Library administrators and staff should be sensitive to local attitudes. Programs for African Americans should be developed in such a way as to appeal to positive, shared community values such as economic development, support for children, literacy and lifelong learning. Library staff must communicate that service to all populations, including the African American community, is in the public interest. It is important to generate community support to ensure that funding proposals receive serious consideration by officials with imple-

mentation power. Librarians and library administrators should be aware of legislation which could have an impact upon services to African Americans such as the promotion of universal access to information technology and adequate funding of libraries.

It is also important to establish and maintain a mechanism in the library system for planning and evaluating the delivery of services to African Americans, and all culturally diverse populations in their jurisdiction. Without such a mechanism, it is difficult to have any accountability for making progress in enhancing service.

Remembering to say thank you and sharing the limelight go a long way toward gaining and keeping support. A public show of appreciation to individuals who support quality library service to the African American community creates opportunities for local politicians to look good. Be sure to channel success stories and other positive feedback as soon as possible to higher authorities, such as city council members, members of the board of supervisors, the mayor or city manager.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Library administrators and librarians need to remember that patrons of all ethnic groups are interested in reading materials by and about African Americans.
- Identify and develop relationships with community leaders who are willing to speak on behalf of the library. Keep them informed and ask them to come to important city council or board of supervisors meetings when library budgets and issues are discussed. Develop a core group of library users and supporters who are willing to attend budget sessions and governing board meetings. Educate library supporters regarding library issues and effective means of influencing decision makers. Help them coordinate their efforts so that they are visible and heard without being disruptive. Encourage them to effectively demonstrate their support without alienating decision makers.
- Identify and recruit influential members of the African American community to serve on your library's Board of Trustees, Foundation Board or Friends group.
- Events such as the California Library Association's Legislative Day offer excellent opportunities for libraries and communities to champion library issues. Encourage library supporters and staff to attend such events and promote them to patrons and in the community. It makes a difference when library users–not just librarians–meet with legislators.
- Establish positive relationships with local government officials. Encourage them to become advocates for the library in your community. Share information that enables them to be advocates for the library.
- Include library service needs in local planning documents such as City or County master plans. Make friends with the planning department and encourage them to support the

"The concept of public libraries is in many ways revolutionary, as revolutionary as the idea of a democracy where all are equal and access to ideas is free to everyone. Perhaps many who have become librarians do not realize that the organization which they represent is basic to these democratic principles."

Binnie Tate Wilkin, Library Services Consultant and Professional Storyteller

library in the community's future.

- Inform appropriate government officials, library commissioners and staff about legislative issues that impact the library.
- Be aware of any groups in the community that are hostile to free speech. Be sensitive to the politics of certain issues and groups and be prepared to listen politely to hostile patrons. Asking for and listening to input from others meets the basic human need that all of us have to be acknowledged and heard.
- Be prepared to explain or defend the library's policies. Develop written policies and guidelines before something new takes effect. Make sure that all staff are familiar with written policies. Make policies accessible to staff for review, or to patrons who wish to see them.
- Encourage local support for legislation that provides statewide funding of libraries.

"When I was nine years old,

I was bedridden for six months

following a bout of rheumatic

fever. At that time,

I read everything

I could get my hands on and

discovered a world beyond my

East Harlem neighborhood.

The value of public libraries,

offering free reading materials,

cannot be overestimated

in the lives of our children."

Alvin F. Poussaint, MD
Harvard Medical School
Department of Psychiatry

Evaluation

Evaluation deals with facts, not perceptions and assumptions. By using systematic tracking and regular review of data, you can adapt your marketing strategies and activities to what you have learned. In the end, evaluation is the toughest, most necessary task.

Past studies and task force groups have established that more than traditional services are needed to fully meet the information needs of African Americans and other culturally diverse groups in the library's community. The library's mission statement, strategic plan and measurable objectives should include service to diverse populations in the community. Staff must establish goals, develop measurable objectives, and a formal process for evaluation, using effective and relevant tools which provide both quantitative and qualitative feedback.

The library can use measures that are not necessarily traditional, but reflect community values. For instance, some users are reluctant to check out materials, but prefer to sit in the library daily to read, use computers or typewriters, etc. The most valid measure for this group would not be circulation statistics, but head counts. Other measures include: use of automated systems to track use per hour that the library is open; number of names on Internet users sign-up sheets; reference fill rates; and pickup counts from tables. In evaluation, it is important to use a combination of measurements that reflect different types of usage and to use these measurements in a consistent manner.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Use surveys, focus groups and exit interviews to elicit feedback regarding programs and services.
- Evaluate the use of the collection and purchase materials which are needed and requested by the public. Some automated systems can provide information for this purpose.

- If your library undertakes a new program or service, create a system to track patron comments and feedback.

Conclusion

Our main goal as librarians should be to provide excellent materials, services and programs to all of our users. This requires library policies that provide equal access for everyone, inclusive of all ethnic, social and economic groups. The recommendations in this document specifically address the information and service needs of African Americans. *Keeping the Promise* is designed to help libraries and library staff in reaching out to their African American populations, to better understand them and their information needs, and then restructure their service plans to meet those needs. Ultimately, this publication is a call to action for librarians and library directors to begin to make the needed changes in policies, procedures, services and programs that will result in enhanced service to the African American community.

The challenge is this: go out and learn about the African American community–their traditions, history, culture, values and their information needs. Learn about African American community structures by spending time in the community and interacting with its members. Develop ongoing relationships with the individuals who are leaders and the organizations that serve the African American community. In doing so, you will be on the road to improving service to African Americans.

It is not realistic to expect libraries to implement all of the recommendations in this document in a short period of time. Improving library service to diverse communities is a lifelong pursuit. Change takes time. It's not important how long it takes to implement change. What matters is that library staff do not stop trying to create a library that mirrors the library's service population.

Photo by Bonnie Kamin © 1996

California State Library staff can assist public libraries in their efforts to evaluate and restructure library services to better meet the information needs of the entire community. State Library consultants can provide assistance in the following areas: facilities planning; literacy services; needs assessment and planning; services to children and young adults; training; serving diverse populations; library referendums; and more.

For free assistance, contact: Library Development Services, California State Library, P. O. Box 942837, Sacramento CA 94237-0001; phone (916) 653-5217; or FAX (916) 653-8443.

Bibliography

"For centuries, our African American heritage has been shared through the oral tradition and then increasingly through growing amounts of print and nonprint materials. Now, technological changes are affecting the development and provision of informational resources. Librarians play a major role and should be leaders in providing continuing access to the African American identity with careful preservation of materials and with challenging guidance to all users."

Effie Lee Morris, Former Coordinator Children's Services, San Francisco Public Library

American Library Association. *Celebrate America's Diversity.* Chicago: ALA Graphics, 1993.

Biddle, Stanton F., ed. *Culture Keepers II: Unity through Diversity, Proceedings of the Second National Conference of African American Librarians.* Newark, NJ: The Black Caucus of the American Library Association, 1995.

Castillo, Jorge et al. *Adelante: Recommendations for Effective Library Service to the Spanish-speaking.* Sacramento, CA: California State Library, 1994.

Jacob, Nora, ed. *A State of Change: California's Ethnic Future and Libraries, Conference & Awareness Forum Proceedings.* Stanford, CA: California State Library, 1988.

Keller, Shelly G., ed. *Partnerships for Change Graphic Standards and Public Relations Manual.* Sacramento, CA: California State Library Foundation, 1989.

Scarborough, Katherine T. A., ed. *Developing Library Collections for California's Emerging Majority.* Berkeley, CA: Bay Area Library and Information System University Extension, U.C.-Berkeley School of Library and Information Studies, 1990.

Understanding Differences: Staff Training for a Multicultural Environment. San Mateo, CA: Peninsula Library System and South Bay Library System, 1992.

This publication is a component of Partnerships for Change and was supported in whole or part by the U.S. Department of Education, under the provisions of the Library Services and Construction Act, administered in California by Dr. Kevin Starr, State Librarian of California. These recommendations are the opinions of the Task Force. However, the opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the U.S. Department of Education and no official endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education should be inferred. Published by the California State Library, Sacramento, California, September 1996.